

6th February 2012

Dear Prime Minister,

Last September the Government announced its intention to change the law to allow the limited televising of courtrooms, in order to improve public understanding of the justice system.

As representatives of the country's main broadcasters, we welcomed this proposal and the Government's commitment to bring greater transparency to our courts. We hope that timely progress can now be made to ensure that the Bill lifting the prohibition on cameras in court is included in the Queen's Speech in May.

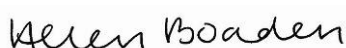
The administration of justice is a key part of a democracy. It shapes and defines a civilised society. The ability to witness justice in action, in the public gallery, is a fundamental freedom. Television will make the public gallery open to all.

If legislation is announced to lift the ban within the next few months, it will still be some time before we see the first case on TV. There will have to be detailed discussions about what can be shown, and in which courts. A great deal of work needs to be done by the judiciary and court officials, civil servants and the media working together to ensure that the change succeeds in its chief aim of opening up courtrooms to make the judicial process more understandable and accessible.

Each of our organisations fully accepts that there must be limitations on what can be broadcast and we agree that the presiding judge should have complete control of what is shown from the courtroom. We recognise that concerns have been raised about the impact television coverage will have, particularly in controversial cases. However, we believe that the outcome can only be positive. The experience over the last two years of live streaming from the Supreme Court has shown that the presence of cameras has not affected the course of justice in any way in this court. Instead it enhances public understanding and allows everyone to see justice being done.

Everyone who believes in transparency should support this proposed change in the law. This is a long-overdue reform. For too long the UK has lagged behind much of the rest of the world on open justice. The time has come for us to catch up.

We hope that you share our view of this important issue, and that you will welcome the introduction of a Government Bill to change the law. Colleagues from each of our organisations will be in touch with key members of your party to explain our position in more detail, but in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact any of us personally if you have any questions or would like to arrange a meeting.



Helen Boaden
Director, BBC News



John Hardie
CEO, ITN



John Ryley
Head of Sky News